



U.S. AIR FORCE

## This Week in USAF and PACAF History 21 – 27 Nov 2011



### Countdown to 7 December 1941.

22 November 1941 The arrival of the *Kaga* completed the rendezvous of Japanese aircraft carriers in Hitokappu Bay. Admiral Nagumo and his staff got an **intelligence briefing** on U.S. forces and defenses in Hawaii.



23 November 1941 Admiral Nagumo gathered the key task force leaders and announced the mission to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Briefings began with the warning that **if the task force was sighted by the enemy before December 7th, the mission would be aborted**. Nagumo saw the Hawaiian Operation as a hit-and-run attack and placed a high priority on avoiding losses to the task force. Still, he conceded that additional attacks on enemy ships at sea or in Pearl Harbor might be needed to complete the mission and achieve maximum results. Commander Genda, the attack planner, stated:



**“The primary objective of the attack is to destroy all U.S. carriers and at least four battleships. A closely related objective is the annihilation of land-based airpower on Oahu.”**

Genda outlined the attack plan. First, Zero's would seize control of the air and then follow Val dive bombers in attacks on Hickam, Wheeler, and other airfields. At the same time, Kate torpedo bombers would surprise the ships in Pearl Harbor. More Kates would bomb the ships from higher altitudes. A second attack wave would ensure mission success.



Mitsuo Fuchida, the mission commander, briefed the specific aerial tactics. He explained the flare signals – one for surprise achieved and the torpedo bombers going first; two for surprise lost and the torpedo bombers going last. Fuchida strongly emphasized the need for bomber flights to **mass on the objectives – carriers, then battleships** – and ensure these ships were either sunk or capsized. Moderate damage, even to every ship in Pearl Harbor, would be a failure.



27 November 1941 The Hawaiian Department received a **War Department warning that hostile Japanese action was possible at any moment**. Based on their understanding of the situation, Lt General Short and his staff concluded that the message was written primarily for General MacArthur in the Philippines. **The warning did not change Short's assumption that the chance of an air attack was highly improbable.**



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The next day, General Short received a copy of a related Navy Department message sent to Admiral Kimmel and the Pacific Fleet. That message stated:



"This dispatch is to be considered a **war warning** ... an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days ... an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo.

**Execute an appropriate defensive deployment ..."**

Admiral Kimmel, General Short and their staffs assumed that Japan would attack somewhere else. The Pacific Fleet did not go to sea, there was no real increase in air or sea surveillance around Hawaii, and the Army's airfields were put on alert only for sabotage. This meant **disarming the fighters and parking them close together in order to guard them most effectively.**

22 Nov 1940 The **15th Pursuit Group** (Fighter), forerunner to the 15th Airlift Wing, was constituted. The 15th Pursuit Group was activated at Wheeler Field on 1 December 1940.

25 Nov 1940 **First flight of the Martin B-26 Marauder.** The B-26 had superior speed and performance, but its small wings made it hard to fly, requiring extra skill in takeoffs and unusually high landing speeds. Frequent accidents in B-26 training led to its unofficial nickname "Widowmaker."

The B-26 was the first American medium bomber used in the Pacific Theater. After design modifications, later B-26 models had the lowest loss record of any combat aircraft in World War II.



24 Nov 1944 **Target: Tokyo.** After plans to reach the Japanese capital from China failed, B-29s took off from the Mariana Islands to bomb aircraft factories, docks and other targets in Tokyo. This was the first time Tokyo had been bombed since the Doolittle raid of 1942. The mission was led by the 73rd Bomb Wing Commander, Brigadier General Emmett O'Donnell, whose copilot was Major Robert Morgan, erstwhile pilot of the famed B-17, *Memphis Belle*. Some of the 111 B-29 crews on the mission had arrived on Saipan only a week before.



22 Nov 1952 **MEDAL OF HONOR.** Major Charles Joseph Loring died while leading a flight of four F-80s on a close air support mission during the Korean War. Loring's plane was hit by ground fire as he verified gun positions. His Medal of Honor citation reads: "Major Loring deliberately altered his course and aimed his diving aircraft at active gun emplacements concentrated on a ridge northwest of the briefed target, turned his aircraft 45 degrees to the left, pulled up in a deliberate, controlled maneuver, and elected to sacrifice his life by diving his aircraft directly into the midst of the enemy emplacements. His selfless and heroic action completely destroyed the enemy gun emplacement and eliminated a



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dangerous threat to United Nations ground forces. Major Loring's superlative gallantry and valor far beyond the normal call of duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service, and reflected great credit upon himself, the Far East Air Forces, and the United States Air Force." Commemorating Major Loring's sacrifice, the painting *Loring's Fini Flight* by Gerald Asher is on display in the Headquarters PACAF Command Section on Hickam AFB.



26 Nov 1956 The **Air Force was given responsibility for developing ICBMs**. The SECDEF issued a "Roles and Mission" assigning missile responsibilities. The USAF controlled surface-to-surface missiles with ranges over 200 miles and surface-to-air missiles with ranges over 100 miles, while the Army controlled missiles with ranges less than 200 and 100 miles, respectively.

21 Nov 1957 The DoD announced that the **first ICBM base** would be built at Francis E. Warren AFB near Cheyenne, Wyoming. On 22 Nov 1982, President Reagan decided to deploy the M-X in the "Dense Pack" closely spaced basing mode at Warren.

26 November 1968 **MEDAL OF HONOR**. During the Vietnam War, First Lt. James Fleming (left) flew his UH-1F helicopter into intense hostile fire twice while rescuing a team of U.S. Army Green Berets in danger of being overrun by a large enemy force. Despite the loss of another helicopter and a dangerously low fuel level, Fleming descended and balanced his helicopter on a river bank with the tail boom hanging over open water. However, the patrol was pinned down by heavy fire. Fleming had to withdraw and then return to repeat his landing maneuver after the Green Berets laid the last of their Claymore mines in a trip-wire line to cover their evacuation. As bullets ripped through his windscreen, Fleming remained in his exposed position and held his aircraft steady while the RT scrambled aboard in what the Air Force citation later called "a feat of unbelievable flying skill." Fleming took off through a hail of gunfire and recovered safely at a forward base, with the fuel gauge reading zero. (Photo at right of UH-1s in Vietnam.)



21 Nov 1970 **SON TAY RAID**. A special task force of Air Force and Army volunteers flying on Air Force special operations helicopters attempted to rescue American servicemen from the Son Tay prisoner-of-war camp 20 miles west of Hanoi. Brig. Gen. Leroy J. Manor, USAF, commanded the operation, while Col. Arthur D. Simons of the Army led the search-and-rescue team. Air Force, Navy and Army aircraft supported the raid with air refueling, surface-to-air missile suppression, fighter cover, close air support, early warning, communications support and reconnaissance missions, as well as highly effective diversionary attacks. Unfortunately, the





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prisoners had just been moved by their captors due to flooding in the region. The mission was called an intelligence failure but a tactical success. There were no U.S. deaths among the raiders, who killed between 100 and 200 North Vietnamese prison guards.



In the aftermath of the Son Tay raid, North Vietnam collected the American POWs in larger, centralized camps such as the “Hanoi Hilton” where they lived together in groups under improved conditions. The POWs, mostly airmen from the various services, learned that their country had not forgotten them. Their health and morale improved for the remainder of their captivity. The commemorative painting at left is entitled *The Raid, Blueboy Element* by Michael Nikiporenko.

Brig Gen Manor later became Lieutenant General Manor, Commander of 13th Air Force from 1 Oct 73 to 12 Oct 76. He received the PACAF Order of the Sword in April, 1976.

**26 Nov 1991 Clark Air Base Transfer.** After disagreement on payments to the Philippine government and a series of Mount Pinatubo volcanic eruptions, the Air Force transferred Clark AB to the Philippines. The withdrawal ended a U.S. military presence that dated back to 1903. A flying school had been established on the site in 1912, known at the time as Fort Stotsenburg.

**21-23 Nov 1994 Project SAPPHIRE.** Three C-5s from the 436th AW carried 1,300 pounds of highly enriched uranium (HEU) from Kazakhstan to Dover AFB to protect the nuclear material from terrorists, smugglers, and unfriendly governments.

A cache of **weapons-grade uranium** had been uncovered in Kazakhstan—left over from Soviet Navy development of the power plant for a new nuclear submarine. When the Soviet Union dissolved, the uranium was just left there. This material had to be carefully measured and safely re-packaged for airlift to the United States. Aircraft from Dover’s 9th Airlift Squadron flew a team of nuclear technicians and their equipment into Kazakhstan to prepare the HEU for shipment. U.S. special forces, Kazakh MVD and ex-KGB personnel guarded the convoys from the nuclear facility to the airport for loading onto the C-5 aircraft. KC-10 tankers refueled the C-5s on the way to the U.S. After landing at Dover, the material was convoyed to Oak Ridge, Tennessee for conversion into commercial nuclear fuel. The photo at right shows HEU containers in an aircraft cargo hold.

